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ABSTRACT

Students' drawings of the family were used as a projective diagnostic tool for analyzing social-psychological family roles of intellectually normal and superior students who have reading-learning problems. Drawings of two groups of students were presented. One was called the "Honor Five," made up of college honor students, and the other was called the "Expressive Fifteen," composed of college and high school students who were intellectually normal and superior individuals with reading problems. Each drawing was accompanied by a descriptive and interpretive commentary. Interpretations were made in terms of the balance in the drawings, family members presented and their distribution, the subject's position in the drawing as closer to either of the parents, and the expressions and gestures of the family members. Compared to the "Honor Five" group, in which all except one of the drawings were free of conflict and antagonism, more negative than positive forces were found to show up in the drawings of the "Expressive Fifteen" group. The author suggested that factors other than intellectual ability impede the reading-learning process. Two of the drawings and references are included. (AW)

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Family in Action Drawings of Poor Readers

A functional appraisal of personality must always be stated in dynamic terms if behavior is to be understood. The total matrix of the personality is needed for the understanding of the relationship of any part to the whole. The Family in Action Drawing is a dynamic thread of this relationship.

In each instance we are dealing with one particular modality of expression, a drawing of a family in action. As such we may look at it as a contributing method of diagnosis of the individual. This dynamic drawing may also be seen as a moment of time in a Gestaltian cross-section; it is more like a horizontal single slide of one's life column.

The drawings may well have structural value and measurable possibilities of content. Some of you might want to investigate such possibilities. For

our purpose, here are a number of observations which will aid the reader in making a judgment about the personality of the artists.

Some drawings are crammed into corners, left side, center, lower third, top or bottom of the paper. Some are small, medium, or large; others are arranged from top to bottom, or across; others are boxed in individually, or paired or separated by an appliance. Some align themselves on the mother's side, some on the father's, while others use siblings or heavily lined markers as buffers; sometimes hostility or restrained hostility is evident in the drawing. The expression is often self-revealing. Somehow each has a message.

Subjects

Two groups of drawings will be presented; one is called the Honor Five made up of college honor students, while the other is called the Expressive Fifteen composed of college and high school students.

The Honor Five

The five college honor students include two seniors and three juniors from major fields of philosophy, liberal arts, English, and education. These students were selected at random to explore whether honor students projected personal problems in their drawings and to compare their production with that of the Expressive Fifteen who were intellectually normal and superior individuals with reading-learning problems. Four of the five drawings showed a balanced and even distribution of which three were cohesive, grouped around the table, talking or playing. The style was tri-dimensional. These four drawings were basically free of conflict and antagonism. The fifth only is described here for its extreme deviation in a different way. His drawings are dimensional and symbolized. His parents are shown as a spiral coil and

a boxed rectangle. The two siblings are a bon-fire and a smoky square. He is a V. He added a stranger in the form of a bulbous cross to separate him from his parents.

The Expressive Fifteen

This group includes persons around seventeen to twenty-eight years of age with reading problems, two of whom have graduated from college. Some are in college and a few are in high school.

Drawings one and two serve as extremes in portraying violent action and total conformation. The first is by a near-compulsive youth and a poor reader. The second is by an able college girl, somewhat underachieving, who has been submerged by a capable and very outgoing older sister. The sister has been left out of the family picture.

Accompanying each drawing is a descriptive and interpretive commentary which should be helpful in understanding the personality of the artist.

Out of the fifteen drawings what mother or father was doing was not significant of any interpretation. They were either posing or at work with no distinction between the two. The location of the subject, above or below or to the side of the parent(s) revealed no useful information. Significantly, though, in ten of the drawings the subject was located closer to the mother, whereas in only two of the drawings was the subject closer to the father.

What follows is a brief characterization of some drawings of the Expressive Fifteen with some bits of interpretation where they are appropriate.

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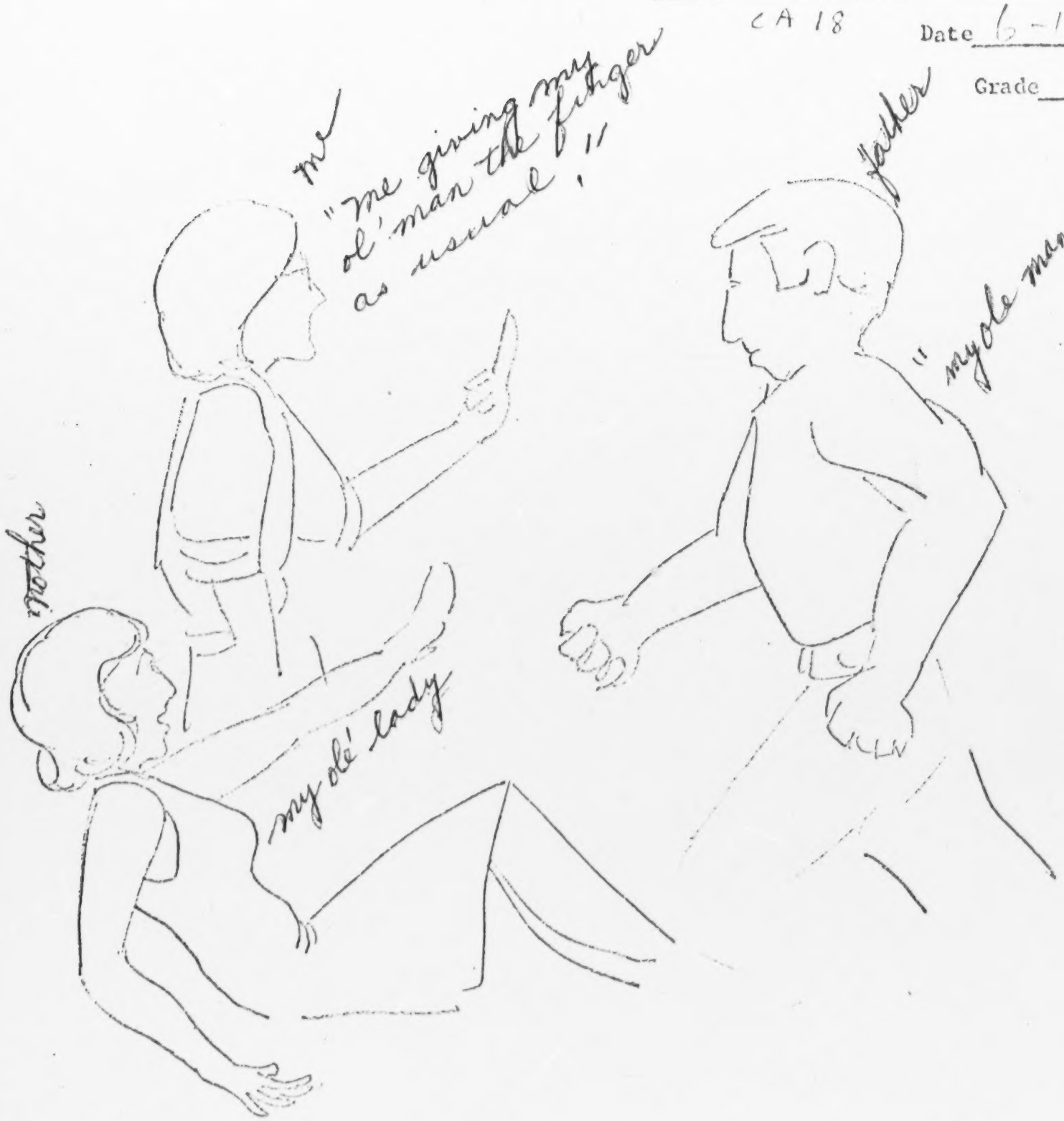

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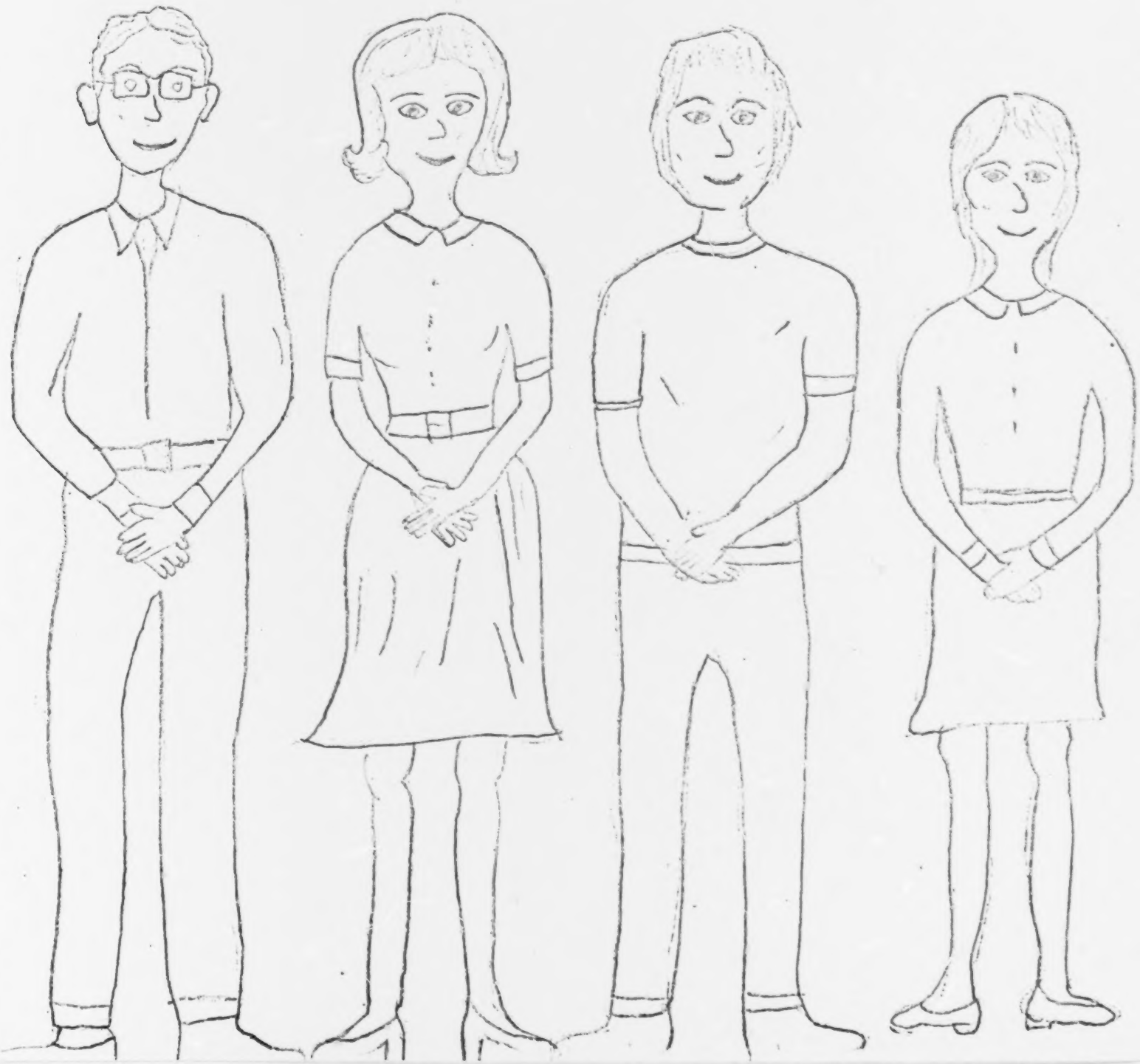

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1. Jack. Male. C.A. 18. Superior intellect; a school drop-out; 8th grade educational performance. He is an ex-marijuana user under the Texas Rehabilitation program. His father is an army career man. The drawing gives an impression of bigness; the upper half page suggests uncertainty; there's positiveness in heavy stroking and pressure; the movement is impulsive, hyper-manic. Notice the sweep and variability -- all are threatening as are the strong stances, arms outward. There is fear, threat, compulsion, impulsion; even the signature is leftward.

2. Marianne. Female. C.A. 20. Superior intellect; college sophomore; low "B" performance and underachieving. Her father is a minister. The drawing is stylized in good proportion, fine balance, and in age order. The whole picture conforms. The stroking is uniform with some emphasis to the head which may be suggestive of self concern. The inward flow shows some introspection. The arms are small, crossed and close indicating restraint, and it reveals patterning to the family style. She seems submerged; yet, expresses passive feelings. Her bright and active older sister has been omitted.

Findings

The expressions are suggestible in eleven of the fifteen drawings. They show assault and fear, compliance, insulation, warning, need for repose or love, doubt, egomania, flaunt and libidinal signs. Since the group is of college age, it may be suggested that older age students with reading problems may have such problems because of some unresolved feeling states.

In one graphic instance the artist placed herself with the family alongside a smiling, teeth-revealing father. She had her right hand up in "stop" fashion, thus warding off her sister. The expression was clear and dramatized. In another drawing a strong, independent, hard-looking father is shown alone in the cab of the truck separated from the rest of the family, who were on the flat bed. A look of misery is evident on the subject's face. As an indolent "nice guy," this marijuana user is putting himself out of reach of the family and out of touch with his father in the serious things.

Rivalry between siblings may be an occasional frustration of reading achievement. Two of the fifteen were definite about the sister antagonist.

Oedipal complexes seem to be expressed in three or four of the drawings, and this feeling may be inseparable from among the same artists who might be psychotic.

Physical debility and lack of drive appear as weaknesses in three of the drawings. Two show over-drive and need to spend physical energy, which means that mental energy is not ready for use.

Compliance appears as a negative influence in two of the drawings.

Whole, balanced family units show up four times in the drawings of the Honor Five and only three times out of the Expressive Fifteen.

Conclusions

More negative than positive forces have shown up in these drawings. Since the intellectual level for each of the fifteen is known to be average or superior, it may be suggested that other factors impede the reading-learning process. Some of these interferences have been stated above.

In conclusion, the drawings show their value as a projective diagnostic tool for analyzing social-psychological family roles of intellectually normal and superior individuals who have reading-learning problems.

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